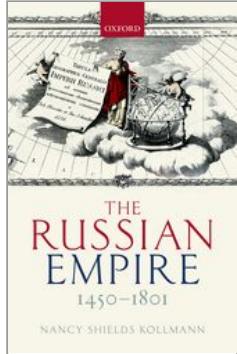


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**The Russian Empire 1450-1801**

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## De Facto Empire

### The Rise of Moscow

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#### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter surveys the consolidation of regional political power by the grand princes of Moscow in the fourteenth through mid-sixteenth centuries. It reflects on the heritage of the Kyiv Rus' state, from which Muscovy derived princely dynasty and religion and on Moscow's interaction with the Mongol Empire, called Qipchaq khanate in the Eurasian steppe. The chapter details how both the Grand Principality of Moscow and Grand Duchy of Lithuania rose in the vacuum of power as Mongol authority faded from the late fourteenth century and recounts Moscow's successive conquests of surrounding principalities, culminating in that of the city republics of Novgorod (1478) and Pskov (1510). The creation of trade relations with the English in the 1550s ends the chapter.

**Keywords:** Moscow, Kyiv Rus', East Slavs, Ukraine, Novgorod, Mongol empire, England, Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Muscovy Company, Kazan

Russia owed its stunning rise to European geopolitical power by the late eighteenth century to a confluence of geographical location, natural resource availability, and chronological serendipity. Russia was able to provide raw materials and luxury furs when north European cities and states were generating massive demand for them. Its rulers constructed a stable political system, capable of enduring through political turmoil, organizing an army and using it to conquer and hold territory, building the needed fiscal and bureaucratic infrastructures. While Moscow began to rise as a regional power in the fourteenth century, its consolidation as a particularly “early modern state,” with reformed army, bureaucracy, and central government, began around 1450. From that point for about a century, Moscow’s grand princes and elites ruled over a small territory in the center and north that was primarily, but not exclusively, populated by East Slavic peasants. One could make the argument that even in its first formative centuries, Moscow ruled over an empire—a multinational and multi-confessional realm—inasmuch as Moscow’s subjects around 1450 comprised East Slavs, Finno-Ugric peoples, and some Turks, espousing Christian Orthodoxy, Islam, and animist beliefs. Here we trace how Moscow rose to regional power in its first few centuries.

### Moscow’s Heritage

The grand principality of Moscow was one of several descendants of the Kyiv Rus' grand principality, which emerged in the 800s on the basis of international trade. Forging a north-south extension of the Silk Road, international traders who called themselves "Rus'" and eventually asserted the title of "Grand Princes of Kyiv" were Viking bands; of no single nationality, they were northern Europeans, mostly Scandinavian, but they readily assimilated others, including in this case the elites of local tribes. (Historically these lands called themselves "Rus'," which generated through Latin the English "Ruthenian" to refer to these lands, which comprise the core of modern day Ukraine.) Their goal was to collect from forest tribes in modern day Ukraine, Belarus', and central Russia natural resources in demand by Mediterranean and Middle East urban centers—furs, amber, and, above all, slaves. Thomas Noonan reminds us not to romanticize the process: "The Rus' princes and their retinues systematically stole the furs, wax and even bodies of the subjects they **(p.42)** had conquered and then exchanged them in Constantinople for luxury goods otherwise unavailable in Rus'. The process... is usually referred to as trade or commerce. In fact it is nothing more than a variety of colonial exploitation." Rus' traders, in league with Slavic tribal allies, shipped their booty down the Dnieper to Byzantine trade centers in Crimea, or down the Volga to entrepôts on the Caspian Sea. In return they were paid in silver coin—Arabic, Byzantine, and others—caches of which have been discovered in modern times as hordes that in their day functioned as a sort of banking system for transit traders.

Initially Rus' traders traveled an annual circuit from the Baltic to the Black Sea, returning through Europe; by the tenth century one particular group was settling into a capital at Kyiv on the Dnieper, claiming control over the various trade depots the Rus' had been frequenting in the forest, most notably Novgorod (somewhat inland with ready river access to the Baltic), Smolensk on the upper Dnieper, Rostov in the upper Volga, and others. Claiming sovereign authority, they created a typical medieval kingdom, held together loosely by kinship ties among descendants of the initial leader of the band (historians have called it Riurikovich from a semi-mythical ninth-century founder). The dynasty established a hierarchy of princely seats leading progressively to Novgorod and finally the Grand Princely title in Kyiv, and for a few generations in the eleventh century the family actually managed to rotate among them in orderly collateral succession. It broke down as the family proliferated and the various lines settled down in regional principalities, still loyal to Kyiv.

Kyiv's grand princes ruled over forests north of the steppe-forest line in areas that had been colonized by Slavic farming peasants—East Slavs moved in from the south and west, West Slavs along the Baltic coast. Slavic was an Indo-European language that, by these centuries, was evolving into three subgroups as the original Slavs dispersed from a heartland in modern day western Ukraine (ironically, near modern Chernobyl). West Slavs developed the languages of the Czechs, Poles, and others who moved west and northwest; South Slavs became the Serbs, Croats, and others of the Balkan peninsula; East Slavs became the Ukrainians, Belarus'ans, and Russians. That some of the Slavs in the Novgorod area when Rus' traders arrived were West Slavs is attested by traditional Novgorod dialects in Russian. In moving into northern forests from these various directions, Slavic peasants penetrated traditional lands of Finno-Ugric speakers, who were forest exploiters (hunting, fishing, gathering, bee-keeping). Slavs, by contrast, engaged in farming as well as forest exploitation, destroying Finno-Ugric habitat by clearing forest for fields. Over time farming Slavs displaced or assimilated so many of the Finno-Ugric peoples in the forests of what became known as European Russia (to the Urals) that their presence is recalled only in place names, as in the very name of the river and town of Moscow. Some Finno-Ugric tribes endured on the borderlands of East Slavic settlement and in the Urals, and are represented today by the modern Estonians, Finns, Karelians, Komi, Votiaks/Udmurts, Cheremis/Mari, Mordva, Ostiaks/Khanty, and Voguly/Mansi. East Slavic also eventually dominated over West Slavic in the north.

In a similar process, over the ninth to eleventh centuries the primarily Scandinavian Rus' traders were assimilated with the elites of East Slavic tribes, in a process (**p.43**) one can trace in tenth- and eleventh-century documents. While a 907 treaty of Rus' Prince Oleg listed his emissaries as Karl, Farulf, Vermund, Hrollaf, and Steinvith, the sons of Grand Prince Vladimir (ruled 980 to 1015) had Slavic names: Sviatopolk, Iziaslav, Iaroslav, Mstislav, Boris, Gleb, Stanislav, Sudislav. As settled rulers, expropriation turned into taxation and circuits turned into landed control. Rus' grand princes awarded land and people to their retinues, starting a centuries-long development of a landed elite served by dependent peasants who were not enserfed (until Muscovite times) but owed dues and services in a traditional, pan-European agrarian economy.

Kyiv Rus' was no more cohesive than other medieval kingdoms (e.g.



*Figure 2.1* Novgorod's Sofiia Cathedral, built in 1045–50 by Greek artisans, reflects the city's status as the Kyiv Rus' state's second princely seat and major Baltic trade port; in the eleventh century Novgorod rejected princely control and became an urban republic. Photo: Jack Kollmann.

Charlemagne's) that dissolved after a few hundred years from many factors, including dynastic expansion. Here shifting trade routes played a role as well. By the 1100s, as Byzantium declined and trade routes shifted, the Grand Princes in Kyiv lost their ability to control collateral lines. Princely centers had been developing—Smolensk and Polotsk in modern day Belarus, Chernigov and Volhynia in modern day Ukraine, in the upper Volga Rostov, Vladimir, Tver', Suzdal, and Moscow.

Princely centers at Novgorod (see Figure 2.1) and Pskov so flourished on Baltic trade that their populations threw off princely control and became self-governing urban republics in the twelfth century, while a collateral line on the booming Volga route in the Volga-Oka mesopotamia (also called Suzdalia and Vladimir-Suzdalia) (**p.44**) invented the title of “Grand Principality of Vladimir.” In 1253 the ambitious princes of Galicia and Volhynia on trade routes to Hungary, Poland, and western Europe briefly won a king’s crown from the Pope. Still, the title of “Grand Prince of Kyiv” held cachet and regional princes, often allying with steppe nomads, fought among themselves for the honor, if not the physical space. Grand Prince of Vladimir Andrei Bogoliubskii, for example, sacked Kyiv in 1169. Lacking even the loose military and political cohesion of the Kyiv Rus’ grand principality at his height, the lands of Kyiv Rus’ were easily overrun in Mongol conquests of 1223 and 1237–40.

Although Novgorod negotiated itself out of Mongol suzerainty, most of the East Slavic principalities came under Mongol control in the empire’s western wing, popularly called the Golden Horde, more accurately the Qipchaq Khanate. Russian sources simply called it “the Horde.” Located at Sarai near the foot of the Volga, the Horde tremendously drained resources in tribute, slaves, and artisans from the Rus’ lands. In a region of exquisite eleventh- and twelfth-century stone cathedrals (Kyiv, Novgorod, Vladimir, Bogoliubovo, Iur’ev Pol’skii), building in stone ground almost to a halt in principalities subject to the Mongols for at least a century. Princes of towns including Suzdal, Riazan’, Nizhnii Novgorod, Tver’, and Moscow vied for the favor of the Horde, which offered the lucrative right to collect tribute, to call on Mongol military aid, and to claim the title of “Grand Prince of Vladimir.” Tver’ was a precocious regional leader, its success epitomized by its stone cathedral of 1285. To curb Tver’s ascent the Horde awarded Moscow the privileged tax-collector position in the early fourteenth century (marked by replacing the Kremlin’s wooden Dormition Cathedral with a stone edifice in the 1320s).

Mongol patronage was one of four factors that the great Russian historian V. O. Kliuchevskii proposed to explain Moscow's rise to regional power; the others were its securing the see of the Orthodox metropolitanate by the 1320s; the dynasty's de facto primogeniture in the face of the partible inheritance practiced by its rivals; and, finally, its advantageous geographical position. Through tributaries of the rivers on which Moscow was located (the Moskva, Iauza, and Neglinnaia), Moscow could access the Caspian via the Volga, Novgorod via the upper Volga and portages and lesser rivers, and the Black Sea via the Don. Tver' was well located, but did not enjoy access to the Don.

The Qipchaq khanate at Sarai exerted strong control over the Russian center from the mid-thirteenth into the late fourteenth century. Later historians have often looked at this stage as formative of Russian history and even of Russian character. The Mongol "yoke," as they termed it, was responsible for splitting the Russian center from the lively interchanges with western Europe that Kyiv had enjoyed (Kyiv princesses married European kings, trade was brisk). The Mongols are held responsible for Russia's centralized autocracy; some say the Mongols' "Asiatic" ethos made Russians crude and barbaric (compared to Europe). These normative generalizations do not stand up to much scrutiny.

The Mongols were Turkic-speaking, steppe nomads, and they remained living in the steppe (no Tatar gravesites are found in the forested center). After the first few generations, few Mongol tax collectors and administrators ventured north; Sarai (**p.45**) ruled through the intermediaries of the Moscow princes. The East Slavs and Finno-Ugric peoples of the forest therefore had little contact with the Mongols (unless they were so unfortunate as to be enslaved). They were farmers, the Mongols were nomads. They were Christian or animist, while the Mongols were Muslim. They did not speak the Mongolian or Turkic languages of the Mongols and their local steppe clients. All this meant that there was little intermarriage and little cultural exchange, at grass roots or elite levels. To the extent that historians can identify the “influence” of the Mongols, it is exactly where one would expect it—at the level of princely contact with the Horde. Borrowings of Turkic words into Russian from these centuries fall almost exclusively in the areas of interchange between the leadership—military, fiscal, and bureaucratic terms. The Russian word for money (*dengi*), for example, has Turkic roots, as do words for weaponry (*saadak, sablia, tiufiak*) and military commanders (*ataman, esaul*), and a plethora of terms about horses. Forced to pay homage frequently and leave sons at the Sarai court for years as hostages, Russia’s ruling princes and their elites undoubtedly assimilated Mongol practices and concepts of rulership, just as they also had available to them potent ideas about political power and self-representation from their Orthodox religion.

### Rise of Moscow in a Regional Vacuum of Power

The political cohesion of the Qipchaq khanate began to weaken from the 1360s with internecine struggles that ended in dissolution into rival khanates by the mid-fifteenth century. This long process created a vacuum of power that sparked tremendous competition for regional primacy. It was a time of expanding trade in both the Baltic and the Black Seas (strife in the Horde relatively weakened the Volga route). Overland routes in modern day Belarus'an and Ukrainian lands through such princely centers as Velikie Luki, Toropets, Smolensk, Vilnius, Vitebsk, and Polotsk carved east-west connections with the Baltic, while towns on routes to the Black Sea also came into their own, including Chernigov (on the Desna), Smolensk, Pereiaslav, and Kyiv (all on the Dnieper). Since the late 1300s Black Sea trade had revived with Genoese colonies at Sudak and Caffa exchanging caravans with East Slavic lands to the north. In the Volga-Oka mesopotamia, merchants forged routes south, through Kolomna and Riazan' on the Oka and on to the Desna, Dnieper, Don, and Volga.

In the mid-1300s Moscow was the strongest military force in the Russian center, but faced a formidable rival in the Lithuanian Gedimine dynasty on the Baltic (descended from Prince Gediminas, d. 1341), which took advantage of weakness in the Horde to expand aggressively east and south into modern day Belarus' and Ukraine. The Gedimine dynasty halted their expansion south at the steppe near Kyiv around the 1360s. This brought the still pagan Lithuanians (speaking a Baltic language) into control of Orthodox Christian and East Slavic-speaking principalities descended from the Kyiv Rus' state. On the Baltic coast the Grand Duchy, as it is conventionally called in English, faced the expansionist Livonian Knights; (**p.46**) reaching out for military help from the Kingdom of Poland, in 1387 the Gedimine dynasty formed an alliance with Poland and adopted Catholicism for the Lithuanian elite. They did not, however, impose Catholicism on their Ukrainian and Belarusian Orthodox elites or peasants. Over time the dynastic union more tightly intertwined the Grand Duchy's elites with Polish culture—they adopted Polish noble and urban institutions and intensified the dynastic union into a full-fledged political federation in the "Commonwealth" in 1569. Polish and Grand Duchy lands all participated in wave upon wave of European cultural trends (Renaissance, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and Enlightenment); the Grand Duchy's educated Orthodox elites in turn became in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a powerful conduit of European ideas into Russia.

While Moscow was occupied consolidating its power over neighboring principalities to the mid-fifteenth century, the dissolution of the Horde changed the landscape on the lower Volga and steppe. Splinter groups of the Golden Horde claimed traditional trade emporia—khanates had arisen at Kazan by 1445 and at Astrakhan by the 1460s, both claiming charismatic descent from Chinggis Khan. The Girey clan, also Chinggisid, claimed control over the Crimea and its Black Sea steppe by 1443. While the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates were busy profiting from steady transit trade of furs and oriental goods up and down the Volga, the Crimean Tatars maintained the age-old raiding and trading steppe lifestyle, dominating the active slave trade of the region. Their merchants transported slaves from the Caucasus to their emporia; their slaving raids into East Slavic territories brought in thousands. Further to the east, in the early sixteenth century the Nogai Horde occupied steppe lands on either side of the Volga from the Sea of Azov to the Aral Sea south of the Urals, alternately raiding and trading with Russia, bringing thousands of horses annually to Muscovy for sale. South of them, the Great Horde coalesced on the lower Volga in the wake of the final destruction of Sarai by Timur (Tamerlane) in the first years of the fifteenth century. Like the Nogais, the Great Horde traded and raided as Russia gradually pushed into the steppe over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but neither established the settled political permanence of the other three khanates. Eventually, as we will see, they were co-opted into Russian service, but in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries all these forces in one way or another profited from, or harassed, transit trade down the Volga, Don, and Dnieper. Moving east, the Kuchum khanate in western Siberia similarly claimed Chinggisid legacy, but was less potent than its Kazan and Crimean counterparts.

Like its Gedymide rivals, Moscow assembled territory with economic and politically strategic goals in the fourteenth- and fifteenth- century vacuum of power. To its northwest Novgorod was an obstacle and target (see Figure 2.2). Founded in the 800s, Novgorod had been the second city in the Kyiv Rus' state. Its merchant elite had wrested control of the city from the Rus' princes

already in the mid-twelfth century and developed an urban republican government, based on communal assemblies at the neighborhood and municipal level. Over time the elite dominated elected office such that many have called Novgorod more an oligarchy than republic. The city flourished on export fur trade, particularly in the 1300s, becoming a member of the German Hansa network of trading ports. Novgorod (p.47) expanded eastward across a great rural hinterland extending to the Urals; it was farmed in the city's immediate environs, but primarily served as a resource of squirrel pelts for European export.



*Figure 2.2* Novgorod's Church of the Transfiguration (1374) on Il'in Street epitomizes the graceful, single-dome style favored by wealthy merchant patrons across town. This church's interior featured ephemeral frescos by Theophanes the Greek in the spirit of hesychast contemplation. Photo: Jack Kollmann.

In the late fourteenth century Moscow began to impinge on Novgorod's fur trade. It edged into lands of Finno-Ugric tribes to its northeast who were at that time tributaries of Novgorod or Sarai. In 1328, Moscow won control over the important city of Ustiug on the Sukhona-Northern Dvina trade route and later in the century Moscow extended claims eastward from Ustiug up the Vym and Vychegda rivers into Komi and Perm lands. Missionary efforts led by Stefan of Perm, later canonized, resulted in a bishopric there in the 1380s, marking the real start of Muscovite control over the Vychegda Perm tribes. As Sarai's power waned, Moscow merchants and envoys claimed tribute in the form of furs and forest goods and shipped them south on the Volga to exchange for salt, silk, spices, gems, and silver. But a direct connection to Baltic trade eluded Moscow.

**(p.48)** In the first half of the fifteenth century, both Moscow and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania suffered internal succession struggles, but by 1450 both had stabilized. The Grand Duchy's territory was immense and its power growing as it tightened its union with the kingdom of Poland. Although Muscovy was comparatively small, its internal power was secure, cemented by a dynastic war (1430s-40s) that pitted adherents of grand princely succession by primogeniture against those for collateral succession. Collateral succession was the traditional practice in princely and elite families throughout the Rus' lands. Moscow's rulers had enjoyed de facto primogeniture since the mid-fourteenth century simply because of the accidents of birth and epidemic, but when they won the dynastic war, they gained affirmation of a practice that had helped them create stable central leadership. Collateral succession would have entailed constant rotation of elites as brothers took over from brothers as grand princes; with father to son succession, the same elite families flourished over generations. By 1450, Moscow turned to face its remaining East Slavic rivals (principally Tver' and Novgorod) while pursuing trade advantage in the Baltic and Volga spheres.

Muscovy's Expansion 1450-1580s: West to the Baltic

Around 1450, the ambitious Moscow dynasty (historians named it Daniilovich after an early founder, Prince Daniil Aleksandrovich, d. 1303) was on the threshold of regional power. Like the Osman dynasty of Anatolia, they had built their position as a warrior band seeking wealth and power and at mid-fifteenth century each of these ambitious dynasties had elevated their claims to sovereign status. For the Osmans, the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 provided inspiration for claims of imperial sovereignty; they cast themselves as "new Constantines" as well as righteous warriors for Islam. For the Daniilovich, a variety of events in addition to the successful dynastic war supported higher aspirations. They included the rejection by Russia's Orthodox hierarchs of the union with the Vatican (agreed at the Florence-Ferrara Council of 1438-45) and their declaration of independence from Constantinople (autocephaly), which cast the Moscow princes as international leaders of Orthodoxy. Furthermore, Grand Prince Ivan III elevated his international visibility in 1472 by marrying the niece of the last Byzantine emperor, Sofia Paleologa, who had been brought up in the Vatican.

Historians often treat Muscovy's expansion against neighboring East Slavic principalities not as empire-building but as a benign "gathering of the lands," dating "empire" to the conquests of non-Slavic, non-Orthodox Kazan and Astrakhan in the 1550s (Map 2). In so doing, they reflect



*Map 2. European Russia c.1750. Modeled on maps from Allen F. Chew, *An Atlas of Russian History: Eleven Centuries of Changing Borders*, rev. edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), maps 13, 15, and 19.*

Russian nationalist historiography based on sixteenth-century claims that the Moscow grand princes were merely recovering the "patrimony" of their dynastic line. Such an expedient interpretation postulates a direct historical continuity in dynasty and sovereignty from Kyiv Rus' to Moscow, ignoring the fact that Kyiv Rus' provided elites, princely dynasties, religion, culture and foundations of national myth not only to the people who (p.49) became the Russians, but also to Ukrainians and Belarus'ans. As a political entity, Russian history begins with the rise of Moscow, and Moscow's acquisitions of East Slavic territories from the 1300s into the sixteenth century were not a "gathering" but a sustained effort at conquest and territorial expansion.

In the second half of the fifteenth century Vasilii II (1425–62) and his son Ivan III (1462–1505) doggedly, and with great success, improved Russia's position on international trade routes linking the Baltic and Volga. In the way stood several principalities descended from Kyiv Rus' that had long been small regional centers. Several were seats of bishoprics with thriving chronicle-writing traditions (Riazan', Tver', Rostov) preserving their own historical memory; their princes enjoyed sovereign powers and fielded small armies of cavalry retinues. Moscow used (**p.50**) multiple strategies, including marital connections, purchase, intimidation, and conquest, to subordinate them: Riazan' (1456–1521), Iaroslavl' (1463), Rostov (1463, 1474), and in particular Tver' (1485).

Intent on the Baltic, Moscow persistently aimed at Novgorod, which in turn sought support from the Grand Duchy. In 1453 in retribution for Novgorod's alliance against Moscow during the dynastic wars, Moscow seized Beloozero, a crucial Novgorodian trading center directly north of Moscow. In the face of Novgorod's continued dalliance with the Grand Duchy, in 1471 Moscow subjugated the city but did not physically seize it; it extended control over Novgorod's trade depots of Vologda (on the route north to Beloozero) and Volok Lamskii (west of Moscow). Novgorod in 1478 mobilized against Moscow again. This time Russia seized the city and its entire hinterland, dismantled its republican government, and installed a governor. To stabilize the territory Moscow forcibly moved populations, exiling hundreds of Novgorod merchant, elite, and lesser landholding families to central Muscovy, confiscating most elite property and much of the property of the Archbishopric of Novgorod and major monasteries. Using this new land fund, it moved servitors from the center and recruited locals into an expanded gentry cavalry army supported by grants of these lands in conditional tenure (*pomest'e*).

Acquiring Novgorod and its hinterland gave Moscow a toehold on the dynamic Baltic at a time of momentous changes in northern European trade. The German Hansa had weakened over the fifteenth century with the rise of stronger states, notably Poland-Lithuania, the Netherlands, England, and Sweden. Trade had been shifting from Novgorod and nearby Pskov to Livonian ports: Reval/Tallinn, Dorpat/Tartu, Narva/Rugodiv, and Riga. Ivan III tried to capitalize on Livonian trade by founding Ivangorod (1492) on the Gulf of Finland opposite Narva and by closing down the Hansa office in Novgorod (1494, for twenty years), expelling its seasonally resident German merchants. Ivangorod never became a flourishing trade center; merchants and trade turned from Novgorod to the Swedish port of Vyborg on the Gulf of Finland or to Livonian towns. Only gradually in the next century did trade revive through Novgorod, exporting goods such as flax, wax, hemp, tallow, hides, honey, and leather from the rural hinterland.

The conquest of Novgorod did not bring Muscovy riches in furs. Novgorod's fur market had collapsed in the fifteenth century, for reasons including political instability, decline of the Hansa, and the waning of the fashion for squirrel in Europe, while squirrel was the only fur left available in Novgorod's forest. With robust demand for luxury furs from Europe and the Ottoman empire (where precious Russian furs were incorporated into the regalia and insignia of high political office), Moscow merchants went north to the White Sea to the Finns, Karelians, Swedes, and Laplanders, but for truly rich luxury furs, Moscow crossed the Urals, which brought it face to face with the khanates of Siberia and particularly Kazan.

Kazan had been a major emporium for the Volga fur trade since at least the ninth century when the Volga Bulgars controlled the city and its fur-rich hinterland in the Perm and Urals lands to Kazan's north and east. By the second half of the fifteenth century the khanate of Kazan reigned solidly over this age-old entrepôt. Here merchants from the Ottoman empire, the northern Caucasus, Persia, steppe (p.51) nomads, and Central Asia sold silks, spices, fish, salt, livestock, rice, nuts, and oils, in exchange for European woolens, Russian linen, leather goods, hides, weapons, salt, and luxury furs. Situated at the confluence of the Kama and Volga Rivers, Kazan controlled access to passes across the Urals leading to the Tavda, Tura, and Tobol Rivers into fur-rich western Siberia; it collected tribute from the western Siberian khanate. Since the 1380s Moscow had been expanding control among the Perm, Komi, Voguly, and Iugra peoples eastward to the Urals, vying with Kazan for control; the process was bloody and long, with much native resistance. In the 1460s to 1480s Moscow won control over most of the Perm peoples, conquering the key city of Khlynov (Viatka) in 1489. By the end of the fifteenth century most of Kazan's fur hinterlands—peoples in the Vyчegda, Vym' Perm, and Perm Velikaia areas, the Voguly and Iugra as far northeast as the lower Ob, and some of the Samoyedic-speaking peoples on the White Sea littoral near the Pechora River—were paying tribute to Moscow, and doing it in luxury fur. Russia now controlled a vast, primarily Finno-Ugric forest hinterland, in addition to the East Slavic peasants of the center.

Because Kazan controlled the middle and lower Volga, Moscow sought overland routes for its sables, silver and black foxes, and ermines. For a valuable and all too brief period it found common cause with Kazan's rival, the Crimean khanate, forming an alliance around 1480. With Crimean aid, Moscow attacked the Grand Duchy and the Great Horde, culminating in a military standoff with the Great Horde on the Ugra River in 1480 that monkish chroniclers anachronistically heralded as Moscow's "liberation" from the Tatar control (which had, in reality, been over for decades). Anxious to subdue the Black Sea steppe, the Crimeans destroyed the Great Horde in 1502. Moscow and Crimea destabilized Kazan through dynastic intrigues: in 1487 Mengli Girey married Nur Sultan, widow of the khan of Kazan and mother of Mehmed Amin, whom Ivan III put on the Kazan throne soon thereafter. There ensued two decades of peace between Moscow, Kazan, and the Crimea.

The Moscow-Crimean alliance fell apart between about 1505-6 and 1512 when the Gireys sided with the Grand Duchy and commenced more than a century of intensive slave raiding and military campaigns into Muscovite lands. Moscow continued to meddle in dynastic succession in Kazan, creating a puppet Tatar principality at Kasimov in the late fifteenth century to groom a collateral line of the Kazan house for eventual usurpation of the throne. An equilibrium of sorts was established in the 1520s, when Safa-Girey took over the throne of Kazan and ruled in a way that satisfied Crimean and Muscovite interests. This balance lasted until his death in 1549, which opened a new era of Muscovite ambitions against Kazan.

From the late fifteenth century Moscow steadily pushed westward against the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, aided by frequent shifting of allegiance of Orthodox princes on the border from the Grand Duchy to Moscow. Moscow's encroachments into the upper Oka area were ratified by a peace treaty around 1492, cemented by the marriage of Ivan III's daughter to Grand Duke of Lithuania Alexander in 1495. War broke out again in 1500, and by 1503 Moscow won Toropets and other upper Oka towns including Starodub, Briansk, Novgorod-Seversk, and (**p.52**) Chernigov (giving Moscow access to the Desna, a key tributary of the Dnieper). There ensued almost a century of non-stop wars between Moscow and the Grand Duchy.

Successes followed quickly. Moscow won the city republic of Pskov in 1510 and Smolensk in 1514, acquiring several overland trade routes: through Pskov to Narva and other Livonian towns on the Gulf of Finland and Baltic (in modern day Estonia and Latvia); through Toropets and Velikie Luki to Polotsk on the Western Dvina and on to Vilnius in the Grand Duchy; through Viaz'ma and Smolensk into the Grand Duchy. Mid-century brought Russia a major opening in the Baltic sphere. The Knights of the Livonian Order were the last remaining small principality on the shore of the Baltic, surrounded by large, ambitious states—Sweden, Poland-Lithuania, and Muscovy. Not only did it contain the most vibrant trade depots on the eastern Baltic (Narva, Reval, and Riga), but Livonia itself was fertile agrarian land, a producer of hemp, flax, grain, and other export goods. In 1557 the Livonian Knights, who had accepted Lutheranism in the 1520s, agreed to accept a vassal relationship with Poland, whereby some of Livonia would become a semi-independent duchy (Courland and Semigallia) and the rest a province in the Grand Duchy. Sweden, Denmark, and Russia immediately attacked Livonia, Poland, and the Grand Duchy. War raged for the next two decades, during which Poland and Lithuania formed a tighter political union in the Commonwealth of Poland-Lithuania (1569). Russia initially won Dorpat, Narva (1558), and Polotsk (1563), but quickly fell into a quagmire. Now the Grand Duchy's ally, the Crimean Tatars, ceaselessly raided the southern frontiers, while the domestic ravages of Ivan IV's Oprichnina (1564–72) further weakened Russia. When the dust settled, Russia was the biggest loser, ceding Estland (including Narva and Dorpat) and the Karelian shore of the Gulf of Finland to Sweden in the Treaty of Plussa in 1583 and Livonia and Polotsk to Poland-Lithuania by the Treaty of Iam Zapolskii in 1582. The devastation caused by Polish-Lithuanian and Swedish invasions was immense, causing massive peasant flight.

In the background of these dramatic ebbs and flows on the Baltic, Russia unexpectedly developed alternative access to European trade with the serendipitous arrival of English traders in 1553. The White Sea was not an unknown quantity to European traders; the Dutch had been trading off the Kola Peninsula since the early sixteenth century. When Anthony Chancellor's ship landed on the White Sea coast (a companion ship had been stranded), he was in pursuit of a trade route to India. He arrived at an advantageous moment when Russia welcomed the European connection. Received well in Moscow, with promises of full trading rights for English merchants, Chancellor returned confidently to London, where the Muscovy Company was soon enfranchised (1555). In the same year Russia granted the new Company customs-free trade in Russia, with permission to maintain warehouses at Kholmogory, Vologda, and even Moscow. By 1557 English were purchasing rope walks in Kholmogory to produce the commodity they most desired for export. They also bought tallow, flax, wax, and other products essential to Britain's growing navy. The English enjoyed virtual monopoly of northern trade (**p.53**) until 1581, when Russia lost Narva and could no longer afford to restrict European trade. Dutch merchants were allowed into White Sea trade and by the end of the century they had surpassed the British in volume. In 1584 Russia founded the port of Arkhangelsk directly on the shore (Kholmogory was some 75 km up the Northern Dvina) to facilitate trade. With shipping possible through the White Sea for a brief window every summer, Russia and its north European partners built Archangel into Russia's most active trading port by the end of the sixteenth century.

In the century between 1450 and 1550 the Grand Principality of Moscow had proven itself a formidable power, consolidating control over major resources and trade entrepôts in the crucial Baltic, Volga, and Black Sea spheres. Already Muscovy contained a diverse population—East Slavic, Orthodox peasants and landlords in the center; East Slavic and Finno-Ugric forest peoples north to the Arctic and east to the Urals, who included Orthodox Christians and many still practicing local animist religions. De facto empire had begun, on the eve of conquests of Kazan and Siberia.

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